

NOVEMBER 29, 1976

MOVEMENT TOWARD A MIDEAST CONFERENCE

ANNCR: THERE'S INCREASING TALK OF REASSEMBLING THE GENEVA MIDEAST PEACE CONFERENCE. VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES THE PROSPECTS:

VOICE: THE RESOLUTIONS VOTED BY THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL AT ITS MEETING IN GENEVA THIS PAST WEEKEND ARE NOT BINDING RESOLUTIONS. NEVERTHELESS, THEY ARE SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE THEY CONVEY PREVAILING WINDS OF OPINION AMONG SOCIALISTS IN THE MORE THAN FORTY COUNTRIES REPRESENTED AT THE MEETING. AND IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT ONE OF THEIR RESOLUTIONS CALLED FOR AN EARLY RESUMPTION OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST.

THUS, THE SOCIALISTS BECOME ONE MORE IN A GROWING CHORUS OF VOICES URGING A RETURN TO GENEVA FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. THERE SEEMS TO BE GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT NINETEEN SEVENTY-SEVEN WILL SEE A RESUMPTION OF NEGOTIATIONS, AND THAT A NUMBER OF DEVELOPMENTS HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO IMPROVEMENT OF THE NEGOTIATING ATMOSPHERE -- PARTICULARLY THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR IN LEBANON AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA. AMONG THE ARAB LEADERS, PRESIDENT SADAT HAS BEEN MOST OUTSPOKEN, TELLING A GROUP OF AMERICAN CONGRESSMEN A FEW DAYS AGO THAT HE THINKS A GENEVA CONFERENCE WITHIN SIX MONTHS IS POSSIBLE. AND BOTH THE SOVIET UNION AND THE UNITED STATES HAVE INDICATED THAT THEY FAVOR REASSEMBLING THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. IN FACT, HIGH AMERICAN OFFICIALS HAVE SAID RECENTLY THAT CONDITIONS ARE MORE FAVORABLE NOW FOR A SETTLEMENT OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT THAN THEY HAVE BEEN AT ANY TIME IN THE PAST. THE BELIEF HERE IS THAT STEP-BY-STEP NEGOTIATIONS---HOWEVER VALUABLE THEY MAY HAVE BEEN IN THE PAST---MUST NOW BE REPLACED BY A MORE GENERAL CONFERENCE AIMING AT A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT.

THE TROUBLE IS THAT EXPECTATIONS MIGHT OUTFRONT THE HARD REALITIES OF THE SITUATION. ASSEMBLING A GENEVA CONFERENCE DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY MEAN THAT THE CONFERENCE WILL PRODUCE A SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM WHICH HAS PROVED INSOLUBLE FOR MORE THAN A QUARTER OF A CENTURY. AND RIGHT AT THE BEGINNING IS THE ISSUE OF PALESTINIAN ARAB REPRESENTATION AT ANY GENEVA MEETING. THERE HAVE BEEN SOME RECENT PRESS REPORTS OF A POSSIBLE FORMULA BY WHICH THE PALESTINIANS MIGHT BE REPRESENTED IN AN OVERALL ARAB DELEGATION. BUT, HOWEVER IT IS DONE, THE ISSUE OF PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION MUST BE WORKED OUT. AND THERE ARE OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS AS WELL.

THE UNITED STATES HAS SUGGESTED THAT A PREPARATORY CONFERENCE MIGHT BE USEFUL---ONE WHICH, BY SETTLING THESE ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS AND INSURING MAXIMUM AGREEMENT ON HOW TO APPROACH THE VITAL ISSUES---WOULD GUARANTEE THE SUCCESS OF THE GENEVA MEETING. FOR, AS ONE OFFICIAL REMARKED NOT SO LONG AGO: 'WE'RE WILLING TO GO TO GENEVA. THE TROUBLE WITH GENEVA IS THAT, IF IT HAPPENS AND FAILS, THERE IS NO PLACE TO GO.' OBVIOUSLY, THAT KIND OF FAILURE SHOULD BE AVOIDED AT ALL COSTS.